

# Planning for Safer Communities



A Guide to Planning for Safety of  
Women and Children  
in Small and Rural Communities

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We consider this guide as the first step in ongoing process of learning about and planning safer small and rural communities. We would appreciate knowing about your experiences in using it, and what changes and additions need to be made.

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Purpose**

This guide has been developed as a resource for planners, advisory bodies, decision-makers and the public to incorporate personal and public safety into community planning processes and policies.

It is based on the principle that personal and public safety can and should be an integral part of community planning, design and management, and that by focusing on personal safety of women and children, communities can improve safety for everyone.

## **1.2. Background**

The development of this guide follows a pilot safety audit project carried out in 1996 which examined women's safety in three rural communities of the Cowichan Valley Regional District. The pilot study revealed that women in small and rural communities have many concerns about their and their children's safety, and that those concerns shape the way they are able - or not able - to use and participate in their communities.

Solutions identified to improve safety included improvements to community environments to enable women and children to feel safer and more secure, support for provision of and accessibility to community activities and support services. Many of these solutions can be incorporated into community planning and development processes.

## **1.3. Planning for Safety in Rural Communities**

Much of the literature on planning for safety has focused on urban areas and campuses. (A well-known Canadian resource is the City of Toronto Planning Department's "Working Guide for Planning and Designing Urban Environments".) This guide draws upon a variety sources to build upon existing knowledge and experience and includes unique considerations of planning for safety in rural communities. Research has included a review of literature which documents aspects of community design and management that play a role in safety. It has also included input from women, women's groups, planners and elected officials in the Cowichan Valley through meetings, focus group discussions and safety audits.

This guide is not a comprehensive document for planning and design of community environments. It is presented as a working document and is intended to be edited and revised as more knowledge and experience is gained.

## 2. PLANNING FOR SAFER COMMUNITIES

The communities of Cowichan Valley Regional District may be considered as relatively safe places to live. Yet, for many people, violence and fear of violence place limitations on the way they are able to use and participate in their communities.

Across Canada, many municipalities are developing strategies to address violence through “Safer Communities” approaches to crime prevention. These approaches work to prevent crime and violence through planning and community development avenues. The Cowichan Valley Regional District is also recognizing the importance of prevention and of focusing on safety of women and children through its approach to community planning.

### **2.1. What do we mean by Safety?**

Traditional definitions of safety and crime prevention often refer to matters of occupational health and safety, property and building security. Personal safety refers to how safe people feel in their living and working environments. Feelings of safety in a particular space can be determined by a number of things, including present and past experiences of that space or similar space, or by the experiences of others we know or have heard about.

### **2.2. Why focus on women and children?**

This guide focuses on personal safety of women and children. This focus is not meant to ignore or minimize the high rate of violence experienced by men. Rather, it is meant to highlight the unique situations of women and their higher risks of certain kinds of crime and violence which often are not factored into the community planning processes.

Violence against women covers a broad range of actions, from wife assault, to public sexual assault, to more subtle forms of violence, including harassment and verbal attacks.

- Using definitions from the Criminal Code of Canada, one out of every two women in Canada since the age of 16 has been physically or sexually assaulted by a man at least once.
- The highest rates of violence (59%) were reported by women in B.C.
- One of every three women in B.C. is assaulted by her husband or partner.
- 39% of women in Canada have been sexually assaulted, about half by someone known to them.
- 2.5 million women in Canada have been victims of assault by a stranger.
- Only about 6% of sexual assaults are ever reported to police. Of these only about 16% make it to court. (The Daily Statistics Canada, 1993:3)
- 87% of women have experienced sexual harassment, about half from men known to them. Kinds of

harassment: being followed, indecent exposure, verbal abuse, threats, intimidating behaviour. (Johnson, 1996:97)

### **2.3. Beyond Gender**

Risk of violence is linked not only to gender, but to age, race/ethnicity, physical and intellectual abilities, class/income and sexual orientation. Any or all of these factors affect people's risk of violence, their perceptions about safety, and the choices they may or may not have in their community. For example,

- Young, single women are at greater risk of stranger assaults and of sexual harassment at work than any other age group. (Johnson, 1996:104)
- As many as 90% of women with disabilities are assaulted or abused. (Stimpson and Best, 1991)
- An estimated 80% of aboriginal women have been assaulted or abused. Aboriginal women are four times more likely than Canadian women to die of accidents or violence. (Absolon, Heber, MacDonald, 1996:67)

When rates and types of victimization are examined in light of economic, social and political conditions, many links between disadvantage and vulnerability, discrimination and inaccessibility emerge.

Income level, for example, affects many life choices - about employment, where to live, accessibility to education and other community services. Limited financial resources will affect a person's ability to leave an abusive situation at home or at work, limit the ability to own a car which provides both safety and accessibility.

In turn, lack of safe, accessible transportation may limit the ability to attend school or to access community support services. These are all issues around personal safety.

Overall, women are more likely to live in low income situations than men (inset). However, young, single mothers, aboriginal women, seniors and visible minority women are among women who live in low income situations most often.

These are just a few examples of complex and diverse issues experienced by many women around their safety. Each and all of the factors mentioned may present obstacles to safety and each needs to be considered in the context of community development, highlighting the need for planning to include an exploration of the diversity of safety issues on a variety of levels.

- *On average, Canadian women earn less than their male counterparts and women make up over half (56%) of all people living in low income situations.*
- *In 1993, 56% of unattached seniors, 33% of Aboriginal women and 28% of visible minority women lived in a low income situation.*
- *Approximately 80% of single parent families are headed by women, and 60% of female lone parents live in low income situations (compared to 13% of two parent families).*
- *Aboriginal women are unemployed two times that of the national average for women and earn \$2,000 less per year than the average Canadian woman. (Statistics Canada, 1995: 85,153)*

## **2.4. Fear of Crime and Violence**

Research on fear of crime has shown that first hand experience of victimization is only one dimension of fear. “Repeated exposure to threatening situations, vulnerability to the aftermath and the consequences of violence, and the lack, real or perceived, of adequate avenues of redress all influence perception of risk and fear.” (Solicitor General, 1989)

Like many rural communities, the Cowichan Valley Regional District is a relatively safe place to live. Yet, many people, particularly women and children, have concerns about their safety in public and semi-public places - at home alone, walking alone in our neighbourhoods after dark, going out at night to meetings, waiting for and using public transportation, at our places of work, and school.

A national study done in 1993 found that 57% of women restrict their activities out of concern for their safety, including major life decisions about where to live and work, about education and recreation, and many seemingly routine activities such as shopping or visiting a friend (Statistics Canada, 1993).

For women in any of these situations,

*55% are worried about walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark,  
76% are worried about waiting for or using public transportation after dark,  
83% are worried about walking alone to their car in a parking garage,  
40% are worried about being home alone at night.*

(Statistics Canada, Violence Against Women Survey, 1993)

Community consultation through surveys and discussions with women in communities of the Cowichan Valley have mirrored the national statistics on women’s fear of crime and violence.

**It is important not to dismiss women’s fear as trivial or hysterical, or as insignificant in relation to reported statistics on random acts of crime by strangers.**

First of all, many acts of crime and violence go unreported and unacknowledged, and the risk of sexual violence for women in their communities is substantial enough to justify their high levels of fear.

Secondly, knowledge of risks and perceptions of safety play an important role in determining if and when people will use a particular space and participate in community activities. Examples of routine safety precautions and avoidance of places and activities by women due to safety concerns are noted in the following section.

## **2.5. Limitations to Activities and Safety Precautions**



A 1993 survey of Canadian women found that the majority alter their behaviour in some way to safeguard against violence, and over half take safety into account in planning how they will get somewhere. There are hundreds ways women limit their own and their children's activities, and/or engage in routine defensive measures to safeguard themselves, such as:

- not going out at night at all
- making sure to go with a friend
- not attending night classes or taking jobs that require working night shifts
- not going to certain areas or using services they know or perceive as unsafe
- carrying something to defend themselves
- moving from an area or leaving the community

These are not necessarily positive choices. Most women want/and or need to go out and be a part of their community, and many women who choose not to do certain things out of concern for their safety would choose otherwise.

**About two thirds of women who are fearful of walking alone after dark say they would do so if they felt safer.** (Johnson, 1996:72)

Many people may not have the luxury of choice when it comes to avoiding potentially dangerous situations. They may not be able to choose where to live, shop or go to school.

Women who have to work night shifts, who cannot afford to own a car, who have to walk or rely public transit to get to work, school or essential services, women who need to attend school, community meetings and other activities often must do so despite their knowledge of risks.

**Over 40% of women who say they are worried about walking alone after dark must walk alone at least once a week and sometimes daily.** (Johnson, 1996:72)

- About one half of women do not use public transportation or parking garages due to concerns for their safety.
  - Women are eight times more likely than men to forego an evening activity due to concerns for their safety.
  - 68% of women routinely lock their car doors when driving (as compared with 40% of men)
  - 58% of women routinely check the back seat of their car before getting in (as compared with 33% of men)
- (Johnson, 1996:73)

## **2.6. Implications for Communities**

When the ability of women and children to use and enjoy their communities is restricted because of crime and fear of crime, it affects the quality, vitality and texture of communities. As illustrated in the previous section, crime and fear of crime undermines people's sense of safety and leads to withdrawal from community life, but the social and economic implications extend beyond the individual to the whole community.

In addition to effects on social and economic fabric of communities, crime and fear of crime exacts broad economic costs. The estimated annual costs of violence against women and children in Canada are \$4.2 billion for social services, education, criminal justice, labour and employment losses, health and medical costs. (National Crime Prevention Council, 1995)

## **2.7. Small and Rural Communities**

Personal and public safety are often considered more as problems of urban areas where there is a concentration of people and higher rates of violent crime. However, it is not clear that small and rural communities are safer places to live for women and children, especially when we consider how women feel about their safety and how that is reflected in their behaviour.

For example, a survey conducted in three rural communities of the C.V.R.D. in 1996 indicated that 80% of women feel concerned for their safety in public places and over half limit their activities due to safety concerns. (CRAS, 1996) Similar rates of fear and limitations were noted in a survey for Ottawa - Carlton which found that 80% of women feel unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, and 74% of women limit their activities because of fear for their safety.

Like women in more urban areas, rural women experience obstacles to safety due to lack of safe and accessible transportation, lack of access to emergency assistance, and physical design of places such as poor lighting, visual obstructions and isolation. For women living in rural communities, obstacles to safety may include and be exacerbated by:

- **Geographical isolation**
- **Lack of essential and / or accessible emergency services such as crisis centres, medical clinics, social and police services**
- **Long distances to work and recreation**
- **Lack of (existing) adequate public transportation systems**

(Women's Action Centre Against Violence, 1996)

For example, living in an outlying area may mean slower emergency responses. It may make getting to work, school, social and recreational activities, or just to shopping difficult. It may mean being isolated from support services in central areas, and from community decision - making processes.

In a study of rural women who were abused by their partners, researchers found that rural women stayed in abusive relationships 5 to 7 years longer than women living in urban areas because of lack of resources and isolation from support systems, and that women with disabilities stayed in relationships involving severe and frequent abuse for many years. (McLaughlin and Church, 1992)

Input from women in the Cowichan Valley about their safety has highlighted the need for adequate access to support services and recreational opportunities. Women have also stressed the need for information, education and awareness on violence issues and existing support services.

Suggestions have included having presentations at Town Hall meetings, school programs, providing self defense classes at local community halls and centres, posting information about emergency services on rural mailboxes and in local shops, printing information and articles in local newsletters of community groups and schools.

Addressing safety needs of women and children in small and rural communities will be similar in many respects to urban areas but will need to consider unique aspects of rural living, as mentioned above, plus challenges related to growth and change which face many rural communities in general.

### **3. THE COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT**

There is a wealth of research which has explored how the design of physical environments affects both rate and type of crime and fear of crime in an area.

*For example, research on public places where sexual assaults have occurred has found that a number of features are often present - the ability of an offender to predict time and*

*path of a potential victim, the presence of an ambush site, an attack site which is often enclosed on three sides, poor visibility and an escape route for the offender. (Embleton, 1996)*

### **3.1. Places Where Safety is a Concern**

Perceptions about safety in particular places are related to both physical and social factors. Factors that are commonly identified in conjunction with women’s fear of being in or using a place include poor lighting, isolation (i.e., no one around to respond in an emergency), places that present opportunities for entrapment, (such as alleys, laneways, behind buildings), obstructions to sightlines that detract from a person’s ability to see what is ahead (sharp corners, walls), presence of derogatory graffiti.

In addition, familiarity with an area and the people, knowledge of crimes that have occurred in a place or in similar places, time of day or year, presence of (or lack of) security and emergency services are all part of how a place may be perceived, and factor into decisions about use of those places.

The following table illustrates places and corresponding factors that may be associated with fear of being in and/or using them. It is followed by an explanation of how those factors affect safety and sense of safety in communities.

<b>PLACES</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING FACTORS</b>
<b>Home:</b>	Isolation, being alone, inadequate security Knowledge of crime and violence in an area
<b>Work:</b> At work. Going to and leaving work in the morning and at night.	Isolation (Especially at night when few staff are on duty) Inadequate security
<b>Public places:</b> Parks, trails, pathways Parking lots Highways and secondary roads Streets & lanes Side streets and alleyways Commercial areas Areas used as hangouts Bus stops, stations Public and other communal buildings (entrances, hallways, stairways, elevators, laundry rooms and washrooms)	Isolation (Being alone) Inadequate security Poor lighting Poor visibility due to various factors including bushes, trees, high fences, sharp corners Entrapment and hiding spots Lack of signage Inadequate access to emergency services (e.g., telephones) Derogatory graffiti People in the area perceived as threatening Dogs and Wildlife

## **3.2. Factors That Affect Safety and Sense of Safety**

The following are characteristics of environments that are commonly identified in conjunction with concerns about being in or using places in communities.

### **1. LIGHTING**

Lighting is essential for both day and night, to see and be seen, particularly for pedestrians and cyclists. Many areas may be lit for motorists, but not for people walking through them. Lighting can also be uneven or obstructed by landscaping or structures. Problem places include parking lots, parks / recreational areas, building entrances and exits, back of buildings, communal areas of buildings, pedestrian pathways.

#### **Safety concerns include:**

- not being able to see an adequate distance or into potential hiding areas. when lighting is uneven or inconsistent it can create isolated spots, shadows (for example, when lighting is obscured by vegetation or other similar barriers).
- entrances and exits, indoor communal areas are often inadequately lit, or existing lighting is not maintained promptly.
- improper lighting that causes glare can also impede visibility.

### **2. ISOLATION**

Isolation is associated with being in a place where there is no one around that would hear a call for help, or little prospect of getting to help on foot. Isolated areas include places that are not used intensively, and/or are vacant, for example, after dark or during certain times of the day such as parks, parking lots, paths, buildings, highways and rural roads.

#### **Factors that cause and contribute to isolation include:**

- absence of people around the area - residents and particular user groups.
- inadequate access to emergency services, for example, public telephones and signage which provides direction and information.
- vacant buildings as well as spaces that are inadequately lit, or without security.
- lack of surveillance due to building design or placement.
- lack of or inadequate lighting.

### **3. MAINTENANCE**

Maintenance of facilities such as sidewalks is essential for safety; maintenance of buildings and grounds also contributes to a sense of ownership of space. If a place is littered with garbage or graffiti (especially racist and other derogatory messages) it presents a message that it is not safe for some people to be.

### **4. SIGHTLINES**

People need to be able to see far enough ahead to anticipate potential problems/danger. Areas where sightlines may be a problem are pathways, trails, hallways, stairways, building entrances and exits. Problems can include:

- recessed entrances and exits
- visual barriers such as high, solid fences, landscaping, vegetative cover and bushes
- sharp curves or steep grades in roads or driveways
- sharp corners in halls and stairways; room dividers

## **5. SIGNAGE**

Signage is necessary for people to know where they are and where they are going. It can also provide essential information about accessing emergency services or public facilities, and can lend messages about an area's ownership, intended use, and hazards. Directional and other information is needed for people who may not be familiar with an area and for people who do not speak English, have a disability or are visually impaired. It is important that signage be well-placed, well lit but free of glare.

## **6. MOVEMENT PREDICTORS**

Movement predictors are paths or routes where a potential attacker can predict a person's movement, and which offer no alternative for a person to escape. Problematic places include paths, trails, tunnels, hallways, public washrooms. Safety concerns may also be compounded by poor lighting, lack of adequate emergency outlets or security features, knowledge of the area and of alternative routes.

## **7. ENTRAPMENT SPOTS**

Entrapment spots are offered by small, confined, often isolated areas, that present opportunities for hiding and surprise to a victim, and an enclosed area in which an assault may be committed. Examples include spaces in and around buildings, such as alcoves, recessed entrances and exits, storage buildings, isolated rooms, washrooms, elevators, vacant buildings, car lots. Problems may be exacerbated where there is poor lighting and obstacles to visibility, inadequate access to emergency services or no alternative route through an area.

## **8. GENERAL DESIGN**

General design and layout of an area needs to be clear for people to know where they are and what direction they need to go to reach their destination. An unclear layout can create confusion as to direction; problems can also be compounded by lack of adequate signage, isolation, poor lighting, etc.

### **3.3. Addressing Safety Through Planning and Design**

Incorporating considerations for personal safety into planning and design of communities is an important component of crime prevention. Research suggests that safety and security in public places can be enhanced by design and management of the physical environment that seeks to minimize or eliminate opportunities for crime and concurrently, increases people's sense of safety.

The following are general principles for planning and design of the community environment to support safety.

**1. Provide for awareness and clarity of surroundings.**

- General design and layout of an area or building should provide for ease of navigation, clarity of surroundings and visibility. An area or building should “make sense” and be easy to get around in, contain adequate directional information, emergency outlets (e.g., public telephones). Considerations should include aspects such as clear sightlines and well-lit pedestrian pathways.

**2. Provide for adequate visibility and opportunities for casual surveillance**

- Provide adequate lighting (level, intensity, angle).
- Reduce or eliminate obstructions to sightlines, movement predictors (for example, solid hedges in landscaping or high solid fences adjacent pedestrian pathways)
- Locate and place buildings, including entrances, and windows that overlook pedestrian walkways.

**3. Reduce isolation**

- Encourage a mix of land uses (e.g., residential and commercial).
- Encourage visibility in placement and design of buildings, landscaping.

**4. Provide access to emergency outlets and services**

- Public telephones.
- Informational and directional signage to tell people how and where to access help.

**5. Provide for accessibility**

- Promote safe and accessible public transportation.
- Consider accessibility needs of people with disabilities with respect to building design and location of services.

**6. Include Management Policies and Practices to support safety**

- Managers of places should be aware of women's safety issues and concerns, and be encouraged to provide services to promote safety of staff and the public. Managers can include everyone from parks staff, to building and shopping centre managers, to personnel managers of government offices and businesses.

### **3.4. Planning - A Safer Communities Approach**

Research has shown that in order for environmental design measures to be effective as a tool in preventing crime and violence and increasing sense of safety, they need to be part of a long term, comprehensive approach which seeks to address the root causes of crime and violence.

Safer communities approaches to crime and violence prevention stress integration of all components - law enforcement, social development, target hardening and environmental design strategies - in order to effectively reduce crime.

Across Canada, many municipalities are establishing multi-disciplinary and coordinated approaches to crime prevention, and, although they vary in structure, recognize the importance of community development, and *“that crime is socially structured and that social and economic inequality are critical underlying causes that must be addressed if crime is to diminish.”* (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 1995)

Many areas may have community action groups and committees which bring together various interests needed to plan safer communities. These may include Community Policing Committees or local neighbourhood groups formed to tackle specific problems, or broad-based violence prevention committees.

*The Cowichan Valley Regional District has formed a Women’s Safety Advisory Committee that brings together individuals, elected representatives and community groups from around the region to advise on women’s safety issues and related planning matters. Advisory Planning and Parks and Recreation Commissions are also important resources for addressing community safety.*

Regardless of their structure, community approaches to prevention of crime and violence need to foster partnerships and coordination between planners, citizens, community groups, police and local government. It will be important to:

- Recognize a diversity of needs and interests and ensure they are part of the process. *(Include women, children and youth, seniors, people with disabilities, immigrant women and aboriginal women.)*
- Identify solutions that meet the needs of the local community and involve residents in all aspects - identifying problems and issues, defining and implementing solutions. *(Including residents in all aspects from defining issues to resolving them can avoid implementing an inappropriate solution. It also gives the local community important control and responsibility.)*
- Look at solutions in terms of short and long term goals and objectives, and ensure they are supported by policies which incorporate safety and violence prevention into processes that guide development. *(For example, OCP policies*



*that state a community's intent to promote safety are mechanisms which remain in place over the long term and support smaller, concrete improvements such as additional lighting, repairs and maintenance.)*

### **3.5. Challenges**

Challenges to developing and implementing community design and other strategies for safer communities arise out of the complexity of issues and the actual or perceived complexity of the solutions. **Conflicts can and will invariably arise in the search for strategies and solutions to improve safety. For example:**

- Questions may arise about implications for residential taxes, or a conflict with residents' desire to maintain the rural character of an area.
- Solutions can be mired in jurisdictional issues and red tape; they can also seem costly in terms of time, process and current budgets and priorities. (e.g., improvements to public transportation or road improvements in rural areas may be costly; they may also be complicated by jurisdictional matters and priorities of other levels of government.)

**It is important to maintain safety as a priority, to recognize that change will take time, and will be achieved with small, incremental steps.**

- Over the short term, it may be important to look for innovative solutions and strike a balance between what is desirable and what is actually achievable. For example, a neighbourhood's desire for additional streetlighting or sidewalks may not be feasible over the short term due to budgetary or jurisdictional issues. Over the long term, a community's objectives for personal and public safety can be prioritized through incorporating safety into processes and policies that guide development.

Example: Community A carries out a Safety Audit which identifies improvements to public transit services as being a priority for enhancing safety of residents in a particular area. It may decide to include the addition of public transportation services (i.e., additional routes or stops), and may also include lighting for particular stops in its OCP policies for that area. While such improvements may not be achievable in the immediate future, they become part of that community's goals for safety.

## **4. THE PLANNING PROCESS**

The following sections focus on the role of the Official Community Plan to support and enhance safety, and outline considerations for community planning policies and processes to incorporate personal and public safety. They begin by discussing public input processes around development questions, then outlines the role of the Official Community Plan, Zoning and other Bylaws (such as landscaping, parking, etc.) as tools to support community safety.

*Achieving safer communities is not simply a matter of setting standards for lights and signs. Each area or place will present unique questions and challenges, and no one solution will be a template for every area.*

In any planning process, public input is recognized as a first and essential step to ensure that decisions about present and future development represent the needs and desires of the public. This means that the process is as important as the results because it's the process that determines what questions are asked and whose needs and concerns are heard.

## **4.1. Getting Public Input**

*However inadvertently, existing processes often create barriers to participation for many people. Timing and structure of public meetings, formal language and jargon used in the process, issues around child care and transportation, accessibility for people with disabilities, as well as other issues around language and culture can make participation difficult or an intimidating prospect for many people.*

Women have a lot of expertise and knowledge about their neighbourhoods and communities. Parents who walk their children to school will be able to tell you a lot about local streets and roads, and what safety issues are present. Women who attend evening meetings and night courses will be able to tell you about the parking lots and side streets they must travel. Women are major users of shopping centres, but may not be consulted for their views around design, although their input is critical to addressing potential safety issues.

Most people are not apathetic! They are busy and they have responsibilities that include getting meals on the table for their family, working, coaching children's sports, driving children to activities. They have safety considerations, which include getting to and from meetings, to standing up in front of an audience and cameras to voice their opinions. They also may wonder if their participation will result in change.

The following are suggestions to ensure that personal and public safety are included in questions about development and planning, and will help women and other 'under-involved' groups to be involved.

### **1) Ask for input on perceptions about personal safety.**

- In public input surveys or public meetings for OCP's, development applications, zoning and by-law amendments. (*Safety Audits* are a good way

to involve communities and will provide background information on safety concerns.)

- Questions might include, “Are you ever concerned for your personal safety in your neighbourhood? general community?” “Where would you be concerned for your safety?” “What about this place causes you concern?” and “What would help?”

## **2) Advertise and provide information about planning processes.**

- In addition to newspaper advertisements, distribute information to community organizations, put announcements in newsletters of community groups, schools and other local venues, local radio and cable networks.
- Wherever possible *avoid legal and technical language*.

## **3) Solicit participation and input on committees from specific groups. Try:**

- Parent Groups, Recreation Groups, Social Services agencies, Women’s Groups, groups representing seniors, people with disabilities, aboriginal women, immigrant women and youth; Police, Strata Councils, Neighbourhood Watch groups; businesses, employees.

## **4) Reach out. Invite people for focus group meetings or ask to speak at regular meetings of community groups.**

- As mentioned, public meetings (especially formal meetings and televised!) can be intimidating. Talking with people in an informal setting on their own ground is an invitation to participate.

## **5) Hold public meetings in local settings and consider personal safety and accessibility in choosing a meeting place.**

- For example, holding public meetings in two neighbourhood locations is preferable to one central location that may prevent people from attending.
- Ask neighborhood groups to host meetings in local locations such as schools, firehalls and small community halls.
- Is the building accessible for people with disabilities?
- Is the parking lot and building exterior adequately lit and supervised?
- Is there public transportation available before and after the meeting?
- Consider how provision of child care or transportation would assist people.

## **6) Communicate the results**

- Issue media releases, write letters to inform people of changes that are made as a result of their input.

## **4.2. The Official Community Plan**

### **4.2.1. About the OCP**

Development processes are guided by the **Official Community Plan** and regulated by zoning and other by-laws. The Official Community Plan is the document that sets the framework for decisions about future development.

**The OCP** contains broad goals and objectives - statements of what is important and how that will be achieved - and specific policies respecting the form, character and density of existing and proposed land uses, and the environment.

**The OCP** addresses location, amount, type and density of various land uses, including roads, sewer, social needs, heritage, agriculture, commercial, industrial, institutional uses and hazard lands. It also contains policies of local government regarding affordable housing, rental housing and special needs housing.

As such the Official Community Plan provides the framework for considering development proposals, and is the basis for implementing by-laws to regulate and control land use and development.

#### **4.2.2. Zoning and other Bylaws**

Zoning controls types of land uses and activities for particular areas and regulates building size and height, densities and set backs. Other by-laws can address landscaping and screening, signage and parking standards.

**Official Community Plans, zoning and other by-laws are tools which can be used to enhance public safety.**

The OCP can contain goals and objectives which include safety and accessibility. Its policies can provide guidelines for addressing design and management of places such as parks, neighbourhoods, commercial areas, streets and buildings.

For example, the OCP can set out criteria for development to require adequate lighting in commercial areas and parking lots, or maintenance of public open spaces. It can also contain policies which provide for public input from specific user groups and prohibit exclusionary zoning, for example, of safe houses and transition houses.